

# Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*: the first two records for Seychelles

*Regis Tiatousse<sup>a</sup>, Ronald Adams<sup>b</sup> and Adrian Skerrett<sup>c</sup>*

Premières mentions du Crabier chevelu *Ardeola ralloides* pour les Seychelles. Les observations d'un Crabier chevelu *Ardeola ralloides* à Mahé, le 21 septembre 2002, et à Bird Island, du 10 au 13 octobre 2002, constituent les premières mentions confirmées pour les Seychelles. Des observations antérieures de hérons du genre *Ardeola* aux Seychelles ont été acceptées par le Comité d'Homologation Seychellois comme concernant le Crabier de Gray *A. grayii*, le Crabier blanc *A. idae* ou *Ardeola* sp.

On the morning of 21 September 2002, RT observed an *Ardeola* on mudflats near the Inter-Island Quay, Mahé. It was identified on brief views as a Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*. Photographs were taken, but without a large lens their quality was poor. RT was unable to relocate the bird subsequently. On 10 October 2002, RA found an *Ardeola* on Bird Island, which again was identified as a Squacco Heron. Simon Boyes, leading a bird tour on Bird, saw the heron too and agreed with the identification. He informed AS who observed the heron on 12 October (Figs. 1–2). It was seen until the next day, usually in grass adjacent to the runway.

## Description and identification

With regard to the Mahé bird, RT noted white wings and tail contrasting with a pale brown back and vestiges of a breeding mane. The Bird Island individual also had white wings and tail strongly contrasting with the dark back. RA, Simon Boyes and AS moreover noted the following features that distinguished it from Madagascar Pond Heron *A. idae* and Indian Pond Heron *A. grayii*: (1) warm buff upperparts (grey-brown in *A. grayii*; mantle dark brown in *A. idae*), and upperpart coloration also more uniform, especially compared to *A. idae*, which is boldly streaked; (2) streaking on throat and breast less intense than in *A. idae* and *A. grayii*; (3) buffish crown and nape, paler than in *A. idae* and *A. grayii*; and (4) retained vestigial mane with plumes streaked buff and white (white in *A. idae* and *A. grayii*).

## Status and distribution

Squacco Heron breeds from south-west and central Europe through Turkey to Iran, wintering in sub-Saharan Africa. It also breeds across much of

sub-Saharan Africa and in Madagascar where it is mainly sedentary but may move between Madagascar and East Africa (Brown *et al.* 1982, del Hoyo *et al.* 1992).

## First accepted record

On its first circulation of the Seychelles Bird Records Committee (SBRC), the Mahé record was accepted only as *Ardeola* sp., a category created in acknowledgement of the rare occurrence of this group. The description was deemed insufficient to adequately eliminate confusion species for a first record. Meanwhile, the Bird Island record was circulated and accepted as the first record for Seychelles. However, when RT later submitted his photographs and committee members examined enlarged copies against skins at the Natural History Museum, Tring, the Mahé record was also accepted as Squacco Heron, thus becoming, chronologically, the first record for Seychelles.

In addition, SBRC has accepted five other records as *Ardeola* sp., two of which were published as records of Squacco Heron prior to the formation of SBRC (Phillips 1984). SBRC has also accepted two out-of-range records of Madagascar Pond Heron in the granitic islands of Seychelles (the species breeds on Aldabra) and three records of Indian Pond Heron (the only records for the African region). SBRC has received verbal information of a Squacco Heron sighted on Aldabra during the 1970s by staff of the Royal Society, but to date written details have not emerged. With Squacco Heron records now having been accepted for the archipelago, Seychelles is the only country in the world to have confirmed sightings of all three *Ardeola* species.

## References

- Brown, L. H., Urban, E. K. & Newman, K. 1982. *The Birds of Africa*. Vol. 1. London, UK: Academic Press.
- del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A. & Sargatal, J. (eds.) 1992. *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. Vol. 1. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions.
- Phillips, N. J. 1984. Migrant species new to Seychelles. *Bull. Br. Ornithol. Cl.* 104: 9–10.

<sup>a</sup>English River, Mahé, Seychelles.

<sup>b</sup>Laurel House, 38a Morthen Road, Wickersley, Rotherham S66 1EN, UK.

<sup>c</sup>P.O. Box 336, Victoria, Seychelles or Hazeley Brook, Keele Road, Keele, Staffs ST5 5AL, UK.



Figures 3–4. Glossy Ibis / Ibis falcinelle *Plegadis falcinellus*, La Digue, Seychelles, 15 March 2003 (Adrian Skerrett)



Figures 1–2. Squacco Heron / Crabier chevelu *Ardeola ralliodes*, Bird Island, Seychelles, 12 October 2002 (Adrian Skerrett)